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FAREWELLS

brief

THE

SANDMAN™

lives

BRIEF LIVES

written by

NEIL GAIMAN

illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON

and

VINCE LOCKE

NINE: FAREWELLS—ANSWERED PRAYERS—THE FLOWERS OF ROMANCE—JOURNEY'S END—THE GATES OF HORN—THINGS UNLOOKED FOR—BRIEF LIVES.

HE HAS HARDLY SLEPT THIS NIGHT.

AT ONE POINT HE DRIFTED OFF INTO A DREAM, IN WHICH HE WAS TEACHING HIS GRANDCHILDREN TO SING A SONG HIS CHILDREN HAD LOVED. HIS WIFE STOOD BEHIND THEM, AND SMILED INDULGENTLY.

COLD TEARS ON HIS FACE WOKE HIM; THE POSITION OF THE STARS TOLD HIM THAT ONLY MINUTES HAD PASSED.

HE WATCHED THE LIGHTS IN THE HOUSE ACROSS THE BAY FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

LATER THERE WERE TINY FIGURES MOVING IN THE GARDEN. AND LATER STILL, A SHOOTING STAR.

THEN HE WAITED.

NOW HE HEARS VOICES OUTSIDE HIS TEMPLE.

I WANT TO COME INSIDE. I WANT TO SAY HELLO. OR GOODBYE. OR SOMETHING.

I COULD SHOW HIM MY DOGGIE.

I am sorry, my sister, but no.

PLEASE? I WENT TO HIS WEDDING.

...very well. But the dog remains outside.

THE SANDMAN™

Written by Neil Gaiman, drawn by Jill Thompson, inked by Vince Locke, lettered by Todd Klein, colored by Danny Vozzo, edited by Karen Berger, assisted by Shelly Roeberg.

featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg

ORPHEUS?

HELLO, MY AUNT.

YOU LOOK. UM. LIKE YOU USED TO ONLY DIFFERENT.

WELL, I JUST CAME TO SAY.

AND NOW I'M GOING AWAY AGAIN NOW.

Orpheus.

HELLO, FATHER.

I must apologize for that intrusion. I did not intend for her to...

IT DOESN'T MATTER.

THANK YOU FOR COMING BACK.

Did you doubt that I would? I gave my word.

I KNOW.

HOW WAS MY UNCLE?

He was... I do not know, my son. He has gone from that place, and from this world.

He was much the same, I suppose.

We do not always accomplish what we set out to do.

NO.

FATHER? MOTHER CAME TO ME, LAST YEAR. SHE SAID THAT SHE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED.

She had.

AND THAT *YOU* HAD FREED HER.

Yes.

YOU HAVE *CHANGED*, SINCE THE OLD DAYS.

I doubt it.

FATHER? I AM *VERY* SCARED.

You asked for a boon, Orpheus. I can grant it.

I AM SO SCARED.

IT'S *STRANGE*. FOR MANY THOUSAND YEARS I HAVE *PRAYED* FOR DEATH. I HAVE PRAYED TO ALL THE GODS FOR PEACE AND RELIEF AND...

I HAVE PRAYED FOR AN ENDING.

I DID NOT THINK THAT *YOU* WOULD BE THE ONE TO GRANT IT. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID TO ME THEN, FATHER?

"YOUR LIFE IS YOUR OWN. YOUR DEATH, LIKEWISE. ALWAYS, AND FOREVER, YOUR OWN. FARE WELL."

"WE SHALL NOT MEET AGAIN."

I believe I said something like that, yes.

THOSE WERE YOUR EXACT WORDS. I HAVE HAD *PLENTY* OF TIME TO THINK ON THEM.

I SHOULD HAVE DIED *LONG* AGO.

Perhaps.

FATHER?

I *WISH* THAT THINGS HAD BEEN OTHERWISE.

Yes.

FATHER, I AM READY.

YOU DID IT DIDN'T YOU?

It was... what he wanted. His life... and death... were always his own.

If I could have... lived his life for him, my sister... what then?

I told him many things, when he was young. If he had listened...

but he did not listen.

YOU KILLED HIM.

No. He died long ago, when the Sisters of the Frenzy tore his body to shreds, and threw his head into the Hebrus.

HE DIED BEFORE *THAT*. ON THE NIGHT OF HIS *WEDDING*, PERHAPS. OR WHEN DESTRUCTION SENT HIM TO SEE OUR *SISTER*. OR IN THE *UNDERWORLD*.

HELLO, DESPAIR.

BARNABAS, THIS IS *DESPAIR*. SHE'S MY *SISTER*.

YOU SAW OUR BROTHER, DIDN'T YOU?

YES.

HOW *WAS* HE?

I *THINK* HE WAS HAPPY. I'M NOT *WORRIED* ABOUT HIM ANY MORE. HE GAVE ME THIS DOGGIE.

NOW I'M WORRIED ABOUT... DEE ARR EE, UM AY, UM, EM EM.

That's *one* em, *no* ums. But good try.

You are worried about me, my sister?

YES.

NO.

YES.

MAYBE.

You need not worry for me. Our journey is over. All debts are paid.

Good day to you, also, sister.

OUR BROTHER. DID HE... *MENTION* ME?

He spoke fondly of you, Sister.

OH. GOOD.

HE WASN'T *WEARING* HIS *BEARD* ANY MORE EITHER.

I... *LIKED* THE BEARD.

My sisters. Messire Barnabas. I will take my leave of you all now.

DREAM? THANK YOU FOR COMING WITH ME.

I DON'T THINK I COULD HAVE DONE IT ON MY OWN.

MAYBE I *SHOULD* HAVE COME WITH YOU. WHEN YOU CAME TO ME, WHEN YOU ASKED... I *WOULD* HAVE GONE WITH YOU, LITTLE SISTER. THEN *I* WOULD HAVE BEEN WITH YOU WHEN YOU SAW HIM.

I *ALSO* WOULD HAVE SEEN HIM ONCE MORE.

I *THINK* I COULD HAVE BORNE THE CONSEQUENCES. BUT IT IS TOO *LATE*, NOW.

YOU SAID, "SO?" WHEN I ASKED YOU. YOU SAID, "SO?"

I THINK I'M GOING TO GO HOME NOW.

COME ON DOGGIE. WE'RE GOING TO MY PLACE. IT'S VERY INTERESTING. YOU'LL LIKE IT, UNLESS MAYBE YOU DON'T.

SOON THE PRIESTS OF ORPHEUS WILL WAKE, WILL COME UP HERE TO SEE THEIR CHARGE. FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, FOR HUNDREDS OF GENERATIONS, THEY HAVE TENDED HIM, GUARDED HIM, HIDDEN HIM...

SOON THEY WILL WAKE, AND SEE HIM.

GOODBYE, DELIRIUM.

I THOUGHT YOU'D STILL BE HERE.

I PICKED YOU A FLOWER.

HERE. TAKE IT.

SO. THE CHILD IS DEAD?

YES.

AND DESTRUCTION HAS GONE FOR GOOD?

...YES.

AND DREAM?

I DON'T KNOW.

IT *COULD* HAVE BEEN WORSE. THEY COULD HAVE DRAGGED OUR SISTER AND DESTINY INTO THE MESS.

IT'S *STRANGE*, MY TWIN. I THOUGHT I'D BE *DELIGHTED* TO SEE THIS DAY.

HE'S HUMILIATED ME. HE'S BEEN *RUDE* AND *BOORISH*. HE'S *STUFFY* AND *STUPID* AND THINKS HE KNOWS *EVERYTHING*. AND THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT GETS ON MY *NERVES*.

BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING *SORRY* FOR HIM.

HE WAS LIKE A DISASTER, WAITING TO HAPPEN.

YOU CANNOT SEEK DESTRUCTION AND RETURN UNSCATHED.

DELIRIUM HAS.

DELIRIUM HAS BEEN SCATHED *ENOUGH* IN HER TIME.

HM. THE FIRST *ENTIRELY* NEW FLOWER IN QUITE SOME TIME. IT SMELLS *WONDERFUL*.

YOU KNOW, I SWORE AN *OATH* ONCE. I SWORE I WOULD MAKE HIM SPILL FAMILY BLOOD. AND NOW HE *HAS*. I SHOULD BE *TRIUMPHANT*.

IT WAS NOT OF YOUR DOING.

TRUE. BUT IT WAS WHAT I *WANTED*.

SO. YOU'RE HAPPY?

NO. I'M *SCARED*.

SO AM I.

THERE ARE TWO GATES AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TRUE DREAMING. THE LORD OF DREAMS SET THEM THERE HIMSELF, A LONG TIME AGO.

THERE WERE THREE GODS, OR SO THE TALE WENT, WHO WISHED TO RULE IN DREAM'S DOMAIN; WHO PLANNED TO FEED ON DREAMS AND TAKE ALL THE POWER OF DREAMS FOR THEIR OWN.

FROM THE SKULL AND FROM THE SPINE OF THE OLDEST, DREAM CREATED HIS HELM.

AND FROM THE HORNS OF THE YOUNGEST, HE CARVED A GATE THAT HE RESERVED FOR TRUE DREAMS.

THIS BECAUSE HE HAD SOME LITTLE REGARD FOR HER, AND HAD, PERHAPS, IN SOME SMALL MEASURE, REGRETTED THE COURSE OF ACTION HE HAD FOUND NECESSARY.

BUT ALL THIS WAS LONG AGO; AND THE TRUTH OF IT ALL HAS NOT EVER BEEN TOLD ON THIS WORLD.

Andros?

FROM THE TUSKS OF THE MIDDLE GOD, HE CARVED A GATE THROUGH WHICH THE COMMONALTY OF DREAMS COULD TRAVEL; ALL THE FALSEHOODS AND HOPES AND FEARS.

Andros? Listen to me, then you may all wake.

Some time ago, I created your priesthood, to tend my son. To guard him from all harm.

Now your responsibilities are at an end.

I have only one thing more to ask of you.

Bury his head, Andros. Bury it safely. But erect no marker.

When that is done your task will be over; your duties will be at an end.

If you wish, you may stay at the temple. Or do... do whatever you may wish.

MY LORD? IS THAT YOU?

A strange question to ask, my servant. Am I not your creator?

I AM SORRY, LORD. IT WAS JUST THAT... FOR A MOMENT...

Do not trouble yourself, Gryphon.

You three have served me well in the past; as you shall serve me well in the future.

Have I ever told you how much I appreciate your service? That I value you all most highly?

SIRE...?

No matter. Carry on.

IS HE ALL RIGHT?

Good day, young lady.

You are well?

I... I--I... MY, I...

I trust there is nothing wrong.

WRONG? NO. SIR. NOTHING.

Very good.

Hm. Walk with me. Nuala, isn't it?

YES. YES IT IS.

The faerie gift. I was taught never to trust faerie gifts; they disappear at inconvenient times, and one may find un-looked-for things in their place.

I CANNOT HELP WHAT I AM.

No?

HAVE YOUR JOURNEYINGS GONE WELL, SIR?

They are over. That is, I think, all that can be said for them.

Nuala?

YES.

That pendant, around your neck. I have seen it before, have I not?

YES.

Ah, well. Keep it. Wear it. It is no matter.

Perhaps my journeyings have indeed accomplished one thing.

SIR?

Do not trouble yourself, little one. Go in peace.

Lucien.

I am back.

It is at an end.

VERY GOOD, SIRE.

For the rest of today I will be retiring to my quarters.

I do not wish to be disturbed.

Tomorrow, I shall return to my duties. I have neglected them long enough. And I have responsibilities here, after all.

I have many responsibilities.

YES, MY LORD.

Lucien? The lady Ishtar is presently in the Dreaming, on her way Beyond.

Find her for me. I have a message for her, from my brother.

There are some who have aided me on my journey: Faramond, The Lady Bast, a dead human named Ruby, and others...

They must be suitably rewarded.

OF COURSE, MY LORD.

And there are some whom we sought who had already fled.

The Alder Man is probably being a bear; Etain is almost undoubtedly in hiding in one of the far realms.

No matter; they both dream, and may both eventually be found.

We should send messengers to inform them that they may, if they wish, return.

That it is now safe.

And I am certain that there is much else that needs my attention.

But not today. These things can wait.

Tomorrow, I shall work. But not today...

HEY, LOOSH. WHERE D'YA *WANT* THIS STUFF? IT'S MOSTLY GUIDEBOOKS TO COUNTRIES AN' CITIES THAT NEVER EXISTED, *JUNK* LIKE *THAT.*

OUSLAND CITY FROM TOP TO BOTTOM
POICTESME
KADATH
PUDDLEBY
SARDATHRION
SAFFRON PARK
FLORA OF NEVERLAND
THE NIGHT LAND
ONE NIGHT IN BAGHDAD

AH, YES, THE *CRYPTOGEOGRAPHICA.* I THOUGHT IT ABOUT *TIME* IT HAD ITS OWN ROOM. LET'S TAKE IT OVER TO THE SOUTHWESTERN ANNEX.

MOUMARIA ON 7 LIVRES A DAY
HY-BRASIL BY NIGHT
LOS ANGELES UNDERGROUND RAILWAY MAP

RIGHT. I'VE *ONLY* SCHLEPPED THEM ALL THE WAY UP FROM THE CELLAR, SO HEY, *WHY* SHOULD I MIND SCHLEPPING THEM ANOTHER FEW *MILES* TO THE SOUTHWESTERN ANNEX?

GREAT HOTE ON THE MOON
ALLEYS AND BRADSTREETS
GALAXY
ROAD TRIPS TO
CAMP CUSACK GU
AMPERSAND

HEY, IT'S *ONLY* OLD MERV PUMPKINHEAD, *RIGHT?* IT'S NOT AS IF HE'S GOT ANYTHING *BETTER* TA DO.

IF YOU *SAY* SO, MERVYN.

SO, HE'S BACK.

YES.

HOW'S HE *LOOK?* MORE *RAIN* ON THE WAY?

I DON'T THINK SO. NO.

THAT'S GOOD.

DID HE FIND THE BROAD WHO *DUMPED* HIM?

NO.

YEAH, WELL. IT *FIGGERS.* ONLY TO BE EXPECTED.

HE... HE'S NOT *AROUND,* IS HE?

HE'S GONE UP TO HIS ROOMS.

WELL, Y'KNOW. HE'S A *GOOD* GUY, BUT HE, Y'KNOW, *OVERREACTS.*

ONE *LITTLE* THING GOES WRONG, AND HE ACTS LIKE THE *SKY* IS FALLING.

LIKE YOU ACCIDENTALLY PUT UP *ONE* LITTLE FOREST WHERE HE WAS MAYBE EXPECTING A *LAUNDRY ROOM* AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HE'S ACTING LIKE IT'S A MATTER OF *LIFE* AND *DEATH.*

REAL LIFE. THAT'S WHAT GUYS LIKE *HIM* NEVER HAVE TO FACE UP TO.

REAL *LIFE.*

You should have gone to her funeral.

WHY?

To say good-bye.

I HAVE NOT YET SAID GOOD-BYE TO EURYDICE.

You should. You are mortal: it is the mortal way.

You attend the funeral, you bid the dead farewell. You grieve. Then you continue with your life.

And at times the fact of her absence will hit you like a blow to the chest, and you will weep. But this will happen less and less as time goes on.

She is dead. You are alive.

So live.

So live...

MARY CANBY IS SITTING IN THE GRAVEYARD BEHIND THE OLD CHURCH, HER BACK AGAINST THE COLD STONE OF THE TOMB. IT IS NOT THE CHURCHYARD THAT STEVEN, HER SON, WAS BURIED IN; THAT'S SOMEWHERE UP NORTH ...BUGGERED IF SHE CAN REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE TOWN...

SHE FOUND A TWENTY POUND NOTE IN A RUBBISH BIN THIS AFTERNOON, AND HAS SPENT THE EVENING DRINKING HER WAY THROUGH IT. AS SHE FINISHES EACH BOTTLE SHE THROWS IT AT A GRAVESTONE AND LISTENS TO IT SMASH.

AFTER A WHILE SHE BEGINS TO CRY.

CHLOE RUSSELL SITS ON THE FLOOR OF HER ROOM, STROKING HER NEW KITTEN, THINKING OF A TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAM SHE SAW ABOUT A BOY WHO DIVORCED HIS MOTHER.

SHE MISSES THE OLD CAT, WHO WAS CRUSHED UNDERNEATH THE WHEELS OF HER MOTHER'S LATEST LOVER'S LATEST *BMW*. IT WAS A STRAY.

HE REPLACED IT THAT AFTERNOON WITH A PEDIGREED PERSIAN KITTEN, FRESH FROM THE PET SHOP, AND SEEMED SURPRISED THAT CHLOE WAS NOT DELIGHTED.

DANNY CAPAX IS MAKING A SMALL BONFIRE IN HIS BACKYARD, BURNING AS MUCH OF THE CONTENTS OF HIS FATHER'S FILING CABINET AS WILL BURN. IT IS, HE THINKS, A PYRE TO HIS FATHER'S OTHER LIFE. IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE WHO ELSE HIS FATHER WAS...

HE ISN'T BURNING EVERYTHING. DANNY SLIDA COUPLE OF BLANK PASSPORTS INTO HIS BACK POCKET. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU'LL NEED TO BE SOMEONE ELSE.

IN THE DARKNESS, TOM FLAHERTY FEELS A SPIDER STEPPING TENTATIVELY OVER HIS EYEBALL. A MAGGOT SQUIRMS BETWEEN HIS TOES. AN ARMY OF ANTS MARCHES UP ONE ARM.

HE WOULD SCRATCH AT THEM, BUT HIS ARMS ARE BOUND TO THE BED BY LEATHERN STRAPS. HE DOES NOT DARE TO OPEN HIS MOUTH TO SCREAM: THERE ARE FLIES AND THINGS LIKE FLIES SWARMING OVER HIS LIPS, PROBING AND BUZZING AND KISSING...

TIFFANY SITS IN THE LEATHER CHAIR AND TELLS THE STUDIO AUDIENCE HOW SHE FOUND HER NEW LIFE; HOW THE PALACE OF SIN WAS DESTROYED (*KINDA LIKE SODOM AND GOMORRAH*, INTERJECTS THE SHOW'S HOST) AND OF THE ANGEL WHO APPEARED TO HER, AND GAVE HER AN ARMANI JACKET TO COVER HER NAKEDNESS, AND TOLD HER THAT SHE WAS SAVED.

EVERYBODY CLAPS.

TIFFANY GLOWS.

AT REST IN THE TEMPLE OF ITS BODY, DESIRE, WHO WOULD BE DARKLY AMUSED TO HEAR ITSELF DESCRIBED AS AN ANGEL, FLOATS IN AN EYEBALL LARGER THAN A CATHEDRAL, AND REMEMBERS ITS LOST BROTHER, IN ITS OWN WAY.

DESIRE'S THOUGHTS ARE PRIVATE.

IT HOLDS A SMALL RED FLOWER, VERY TIGHTLY.

AND ON THE ISLAND, ANDROS LEANS ON HIS SPADE. HIS CHEST HURTS, AND HE FINDS IT HARD TO CATCH HIS BREATH.

DO YOU *THINK* THAT IS *DEEP* ENOUGH?

IT'S DEEP ENOUGH, ANDROS.

MAYBE IT SHOULD BE DEEPER.

IT IS DEEP ENOUGH, GRANDFATHER.

IF YOU SAY SO.

ANDROS TAKES THE LINEN-WRAPPED BUNDLE FROM HIS SON.

WE WILL PUT HIM TO REST, THINKS ANDROS RHODOCANAKIS, BENEATH THE CHERRY TREE. AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT IS IN ELYSIUM, WITH HIS BELOVED EURYDICE. AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT HAS RETURNED TO DARKNESS, OR TO NOTHING...

AND PERHAPS HE IS AT REST.

GRANDFATHER? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I AM FINE, BOY. JUST OLD BONES.

AND PERHAPS HIS SPIRIT WILL MOVE INTO THE CHERRY TREE, AND IN SPRING THE NEW BLOSSOMS WILL BE HIS, AND IN SUMMER THE CHERRIES WILL TASTE OF TRUE POETRY AND SONG...

AND WHEN ANDROS TASTES THEM HE WILL FEEL YOUNG AGAIN...

NO.

ANDROS KNOWS HE WILL NOT LIVE TO SEE THE TREE BLOSSOM AGAIN.

IT IS GOING TO BE A BEAUTIFUL DAY.

End

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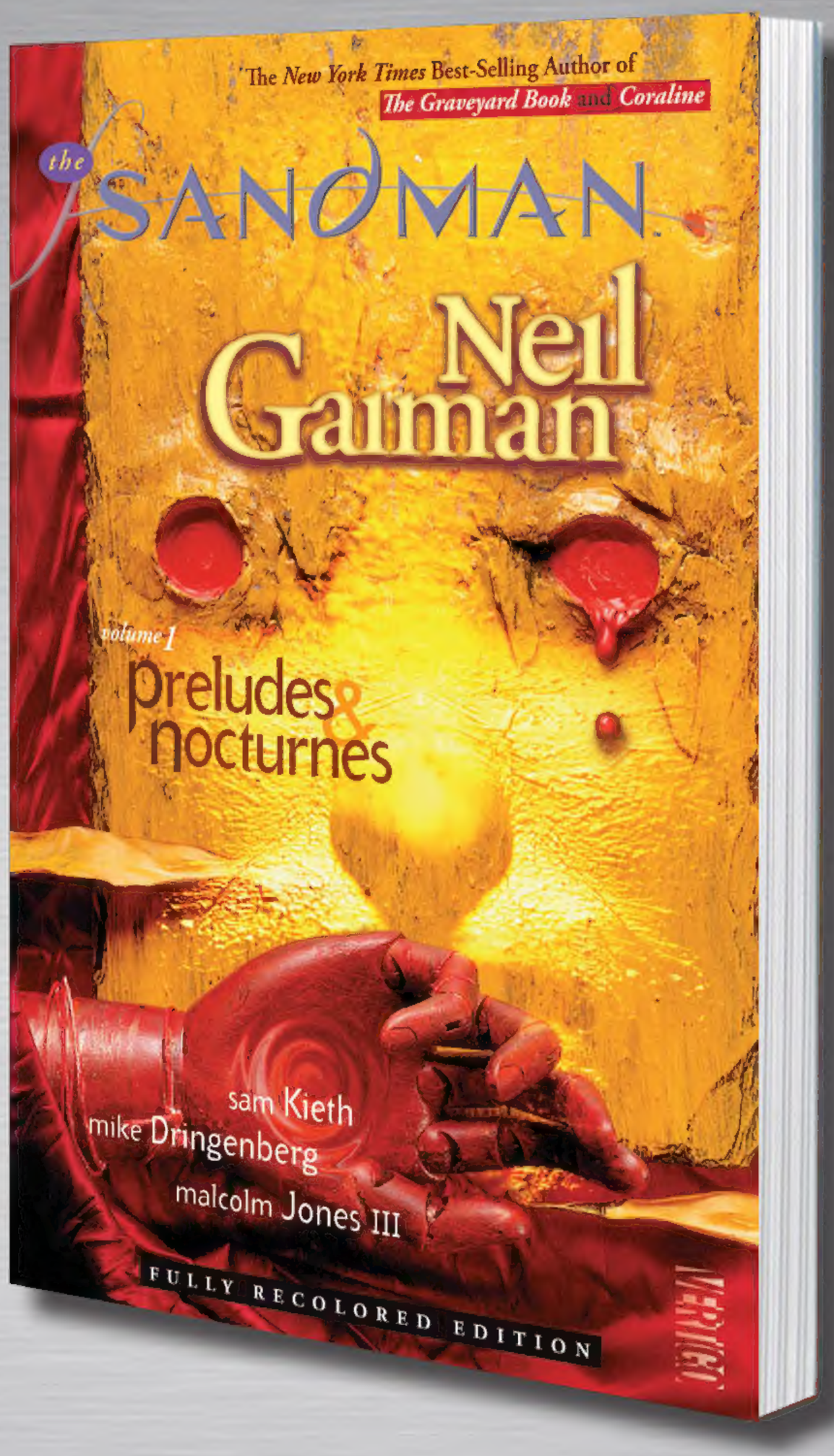

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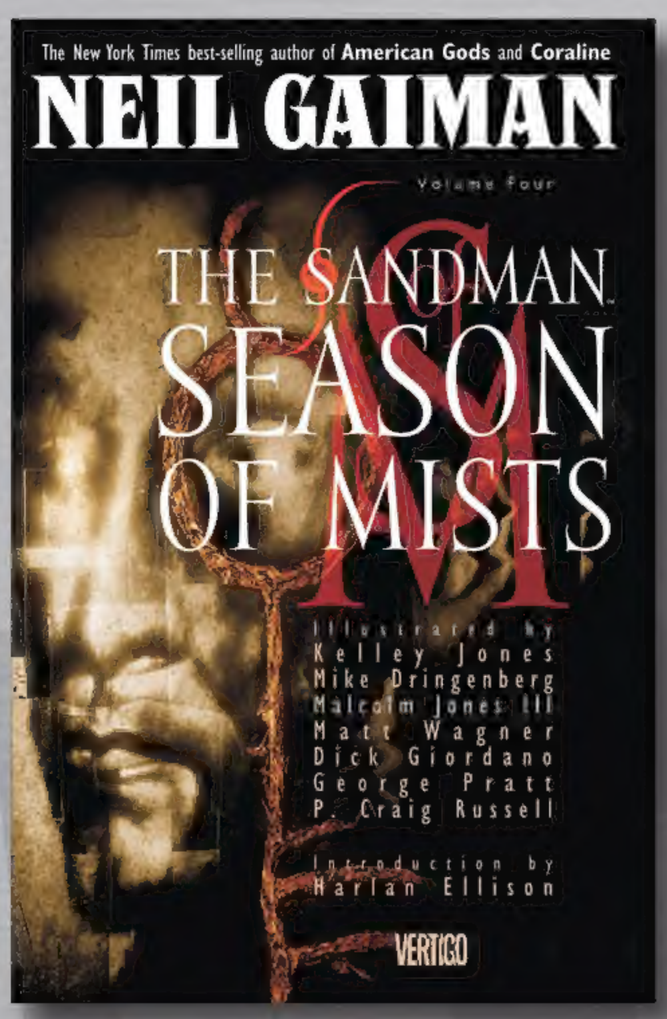

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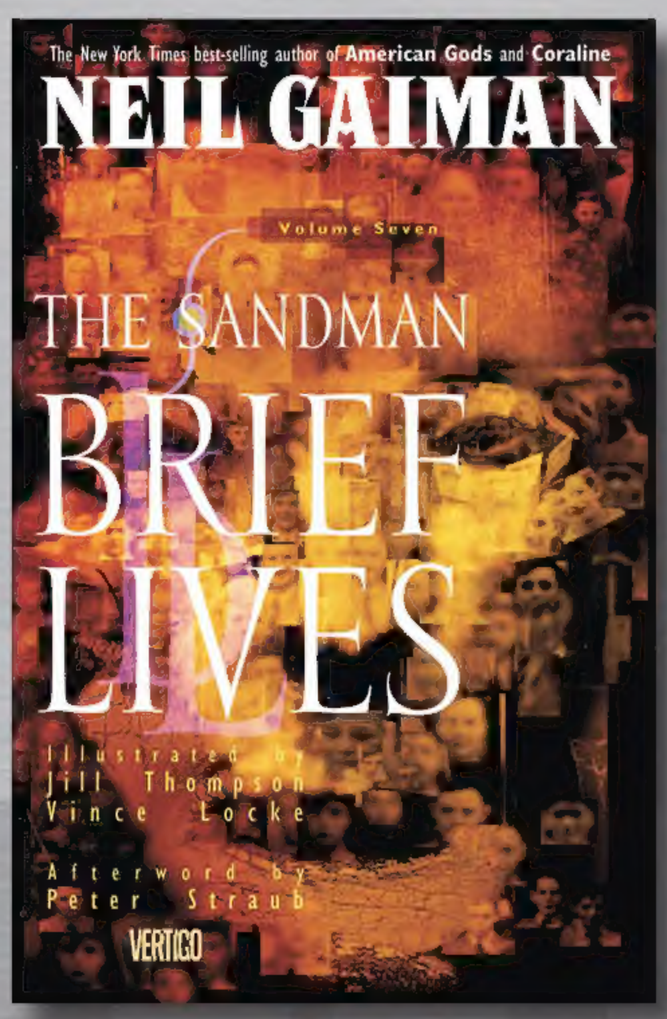

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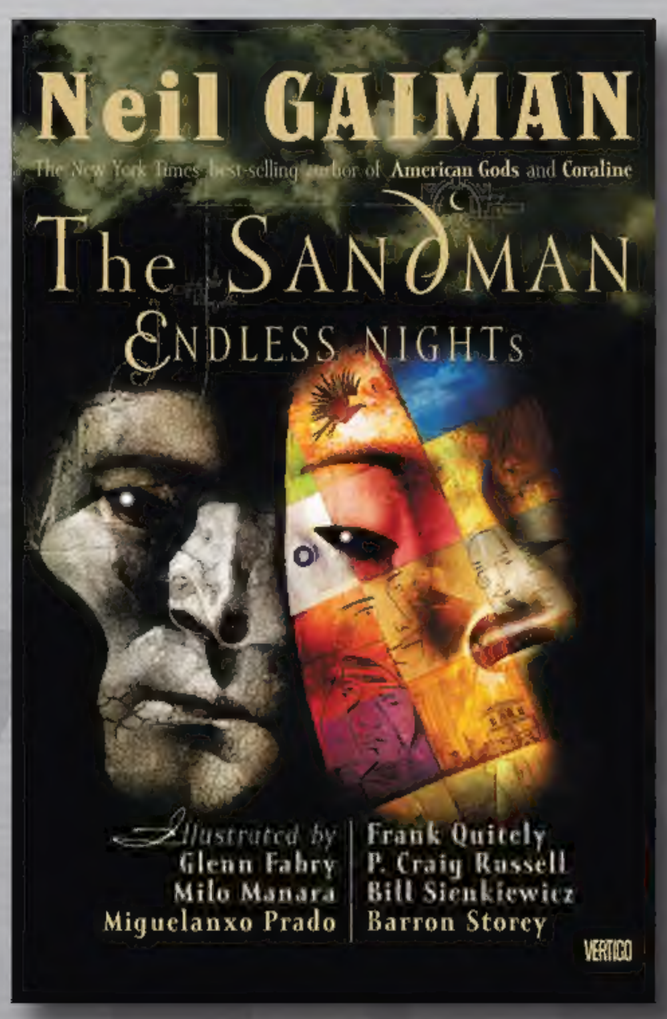

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